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THE KARENS OF BURMA

I

BACKGROUND

101 175 THE Karen people of Burma are now the second most important tribe in the country; but one hundred years ago they were called by their more powerful Burman neighbours the "Wild Cattle of the Hills".

At that time they were unorganized and lived in the dense forests that covered the country, especially in the ranges of hills that afforded them protection. They had no written language and were held in bondage to the fears that made their lives stagnant and prevented their changing the customs that they had received from their ancestors.

181 131 361 563 186 They were not an aggressive people and sought security in withdrawal from the rivers, which in those days were the only lines of communication, and they built their small villages high up in the hills or other places difficult of access. Here they lived in poverty but not without hope that some day their descendants would have better times. But now like hunted birds they admonished their children as they squatted at their rude low tables to eat their rice, "Eat fast, eat fast. The Burmans may come!"

● 173 171 Their origin is obscure. They have no written records and the destructive wet climate has obliterated almost all

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traces of their ancestry. Probably they originated in China and came into Burma from the north-east in about the sixth or seventh century of the Christian era. Their language and personal characteristics would seem to indicate this.

The derivation of the term "Karen" is uncertain. It is the name by which this people have been called by the Burmese. The name by which they call themselves is *Pga K' Nyaw* which may be of Chinese origin and means "Men". They are the only real men. All other peoples are designated by their name as "Burman", "English", and so on.

II

DISTRIBUTION

The only part of Burma that can be called Karen country is that lying eastward from Toungoo. Here in the mountains the villages have never been dominated by their more powerful Burman neighbours and in several sections they retain their Karen names. In other sections they are known by Burmese names and show the influence of their having been overpowered at some time.

On the eastern slopes of the ranges which are dominated by Mt. Nattaung (called by the Karens *Thaw Thi*) are the three small independent states the chiefs of which are Karens. They belong to the Red Karen tribes and are called in Burmese Karen-ni. These states are Bawlekeh, Kyetpogyi and Kantarrawaddi and do not comprise a part of Burma politically except that they owe their security to the British Government with whom they have treaty relations established by the early Deputy Commissioners of Toungoo.

There are a few Karens in the ranges of hills as far

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meanings if spoken in different tones. For example, the syllable *Meh* may mean 'eye', 'sand', 'tail', 'mole' (on the body), or 'tooth', according to the tone in which it is uttered.

Originally the Karens had a mass of unwritten bard literature, poems and stories handed down orally and recited around the fireplaces, from generation to generation. Some of these were epic poems which related the history of their race, and others folk stories which they told for amusement and which served to keep alive the traditions of their tribes. Many of these stories were much like the Negro folk tales told in America under the title of "Uncle Remus Stories", or like Grimms' Fairy Tales in Europe. In these Karen folk stories the rabbit figures as the wily one as it does in the Negro tales, and as the fox appears in the European stories.

Their epic poems have remarkable accounts of the creation of the world by *Ywa*, who closely resembles the God of the Hebrew Scriptures. They tell of the origin of the human race and the expulsion from a garden, which is similar to the story of Paradise Lost. The poems are in five stress lines and are in couplet form like Hebrew poetry. In their earlier days there use to be rhyming contests or "capping rhymes" as an important part of gatherings such as wedding and funeral feasts. At present they only survive among the most primitive villages away from outside influences.

There are many dialects of the Karen language—probably about twenty of them. They fall into six groups: the Sgaw, Pwo, Bwè, Padaung, Karenni and Zayein. The Sgaw and Pwo are the two largest groups. These are the two which have been used in education and in

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533 177 Trained choirs have sung in the cities before exacting audiences and have won praise. Because of their former experiences of being subjected to exploitation, they have taken to the American Negro spirituals and sing them with a great deal of expression. Here again they have adapted some of these to their own life and composed new tunes and songs to fit their own conditions. Probably the suffering of these war years will further develop their folk music.

• 173 183 To the Karen the golden age was in the dim past. It was the old men who were wise. They say: "The generation gone before had wisdom. Now we are but children. Therefore the customs that have come down to us are sacred and cannot be broken without great danger."

They are hedged about with taboos many of which they hold so tenaciously that they are still more or less in the grip of their fears; and while this lasts progress will be slow if not almost impossible. Those who made the big break and became Christians have a different attitude and yet, even with them, the old customs have not entirely lost their hold.

943 183 Their fear of change prevents improved methods of living. This is especially true in the hills where for untold generations they have followed the *taung-ya* (mountain cultivation). This involved the sacrifice of a fresh piece of forest each year for their rice fields. When urged to adopt a more economic method, such as terracing or rotation of crops, they would reply that their fathers and grandfathers grew rice by this method, and being poor ignorant Karens they could not do any differently.

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CHAPTER II

THE ORIGIN OF THE KAREN

The traditions of the Karen clearly indicate that they have not always lived in their present home. The most striking story is that of "Htaw Meh Pa," the mythical founder of the Karen race, who lived with his numerous family in some unknown land to the North, where their fields were ravaged by a great boar. The patriarch went out and killed the boar; but when the sons went to bring in the carcass, they could find only one tusk which had been broken off in the fray. The old man made a comb out of this, which surprised them all by its power of conveying eternal youth to all who used it. Soon their country became overpopulated, and they set out to seek a new and better land. They traveled together till they came to a river called in Karen "Hti Seh Meh Ywa." Here the old man became impatient at the long time it took the members of the family to cook shellfish and went on ahead, promising to blaze his path that they might follow him through the jungle. After a while the Chinese came along and told them how to open the shells to get out the meat; and then, having eaten, they followed the old man, only to find that the plantain stalks he had cut off had shot up so high that it seemed impossible to overtake him. They, therefore, settled down in the vicinity. The patriarch went on, taking with him the magic comb which has never been discovered to this day.

While this tradition is not confined to the Karen,[1] it has a bearing, I believe, on their origin. A great deal has been written about the "Hti Seh Meh Ywa" or, as Dr. Mason called it, the "River of Running Sand,"[2] which is, as he thinks, the Gobi Desert. This opinion of Dr. Mason is derived from Fa Hien's description of his travels across that desert. However, the Karen name of the river means not only "flowing sand," but also a "river of

[1] This tradition is found among the Lahu and also, according to Than Ba Tu, among the Chin in the northwest of Burma.

MacMahon, in *The Karens of the Golden Chersonese*, p. 166, refers to a different version of this story, in which the Chinese go ahead instead of "Htaw Meh Pa," and on p. 164 MacMahon says he found traditions indicating that the Karen formed part of a Chinese expedition into Burma and that they were left behind because of their sluggish movements. These all point to early relations with the Chinese.

[2] Mason, *British Burma*, p. 881.

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173 114 water flowing with sand."[3] The reference to the Gobi Desert seems rather far-fetched and has, therefore, been abandoned by scholars. Dr. D. C. Gilmore suggests the Salween as being a river that fulfils the requirements of the tradition, but bases his conclusions largely on the reference to the early home of "Htaw Meh Pa" as located on Mount "Thaw Thi," the Olympus of the Karen, which is mentioned in Dr. Vinton's version of the story, from which he quotes.[4] This reference is not found in other versions of the story and was probably not a part of it in its earliest form. It seems reasonable, therefore, to look further for the sandy river. Dr. Laufer[5] asserts that the early home of the peoples of eastern Asia was in the upper reaches of the Hoang-ho or Yellow River, of China, and that from this center the Tibetans migrated westward; the early tribes of Indo-China, southward; and the Chinese, southeastward. According to this view, the progenitors of the Karen probably formed a part of the southward migration and, at some stage of their march, stopped on the banks of the Yellow River which, as its name suggests, has from time immemorial been freighted with silt and sand. Here they may have tried to cook the shellfish referred to in the tradition. From this region they doubtless made their way down to what is now Yunnan, where perhaps they found a domicile till they were pushed farther south by migrating people advancing behind them.

101 174 The name "Karen" is an imperfect transliteration of the Burmese word "Kayin," the derivation of which has puzzled students of that language. It has been thought that this word is derived from the name by which the Red Karen call themselves, *i.e.*, "Ka-Ya." The designation of the Sgaw for themselves is "Pgha K'Nyaw," which has not usually been associated with the native name of the Red Karen. In August, 1914, it was suggested to me[6] that these tribal names, which have hitherto been thought to mean simply "men," were related to, and derived from, the name of one of the four ancient tribes of China, that is, the Ch'iang (ancient pronunciation, Giang or Gyang). This tribe, which is indicated in Chinese by the ideograph of a man combined with the character designating a sheep, conveying the meaning of shepherd, occupied

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[3] E. B. Cross, *Journal, American Oriental Soc.* (1854) Vol. IV, pp. 238, ff. and D. C. Gilmore, *Journal, Burma Research Soc.*, Vol. I, p. 191.

[4] J. B. Vinton, D.D. and Rev. T. Than Bya, M. A., *Karen Folklore Stories.*

[5] Dr. B. Laufer, Curator of Anthropology, Field Columbian Museum, Chicago, in a note to the writer, Jan. 6, 1920.

[6] By the Rev. Thra Ba To, in a letter dated August 14, 1917.

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period of less than three hundred years. This is doubtless much too low an estimate, unless it refers to the time of their domicile in the particular district now occupied.

In so far as we may venture a conclusion, it is that the Karen migrated into Burma, coming from the ancient home of the early tribes inhabiting the country of China, with whom they are related by tribal, linguistic, and possibly religious ties, the full significance of which are yet to be determined.

NOTE. Various Theories of the Origin and Tribal Relationships of the Karen.—From the middle of the nineteenth century many theories regarding the origin and racial affinity of the Karen have been propounded by writers on Burma. J. R. Logan, writing in 1850 in the *Journal of the Indian Archipelago* (Vol. IV, p. 478) connects this people with the tribes in the highlands of the Kolan and Irrawaddy and in the lower bend of the Brahmaputra. Writing again in the same *Journal* in 1858 (New Series, Vol. II, p. 387) Logan maintains that the Karen language is a dialect of the Irrawaddo-Brahmaputran dialect, affected by Chinese influence as it came south. Professor De Lacouperie in his introduction to Colquhoun's *Amongst the Shans* (pp. xxxviii, ff.) argues that the Karen are descended from the ancient Tek or Tok tribes of central Asia. Early missionaries and other writers, including Denniker. (*Races of Man*, p. 395) believed that the Kachin and Chin formed a branch of the Karen race. *The Archaeological Survey* of Burma has linked the Karen both with the ancient Kanran, one of the three primitive tribes mentioned in Burmese annals, and with the Miao and Yao of Yunnan (*Report* of 1916). But the Kanran were driven southwestward from the region around Prome and seem to have disappeared from history. (Phayre, *History of Burma*, pp. 5-19.) The linguistic differences between the Miao, Yao, and Karen have led to the abandonment of the idea that they are closely related. In fact, all of these views have been given up, because they were based on an inadequate knowledge of the tribes concerned.

Dr. Mason, in the *Journal, Asiatic Soc. of Bengal* (Vol. XXXVII, p. 162, 1868,) says that the first historical notice of the Karen is in Marco Polo's travels in the 13th Century. He quotes Malte Brun on the basis of Marco Polo's travels, as follows: " 'This country of Caride is the southeastern point of Tibet, and perhaps the country of the nation of the Cariaines; which is spread over Ava.' This statement is confirmed by old Bghai poetry in which we find incidentally mentioned the town of Bhamo to which they formerly were in the habit of going to buy axes and bills or cleavers, as they do now at Toungoo. When this poetry was composed they lived five hundred miles north of their present locality." These geographical allusions seem so vague that it appears to be impossible to build much of a theory upon them. Perhaps the lines referring to Bhamo may refer to a trading expedition and not to a line of migration. And the statement of Malte Brun is only conjecture at the most.

In their excellent work on *The Pagan Tribes of Borneo*, Hose and Mc-

[20] J. O'Riley, *Journal, Indian Archipelago*, Vol. IV, N.S. (1859), p. 8.
[21] *Ibid.*

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173 534 It is a belief of the Karen that their forefathers have cherished these drums from time immemorial. One drum in Toungoo district is, I have been told, supposed to be a thousand years old. Our knowledge of them is, however, too meagre to permit any dogmatic statements on the subject. Further investigation should throw more light upon it.

171 173 The religious traditions of the Karen have also been thought to possess significance in regard to their racial origin. When, in 1827, the early missionaries first discovered the Karen, they were surprised to find that these people professed having received from their forefathers monotheistic traditions in which the story of the creation was almost parallel to the Mosaic account in Genesis. (See p. 211.) The question, "Whence this story?" at once suggested itself. Was it their independent possession from the beginning of time, their only relic from a more vigorous and highly civilized past when, as they explained, they had not yet lost their book?[12] Or had it been borrowed from another people, whom they had met in the course of their wanderings from their northern birthplace to their present home? Some of the early missionaries, including Dr. Mason, thought that the Karen might be found to be the lost tribes of Israel [13] or, if not actually descended from Abraham, that they had received instruction from colonies of Jews, who were supposed to have spread to the East in ancient times.

It has also been suggested that Christian missionaries, traveling to the Orient during the early centuries of our era, transmitted this creation story to the Karen. On this point the comment of Dr. Laufer is pertinent.[14] He says: "The 'River of running sand' in the traditions of the Karen is not necessarily to be interpreted as the Desert of Gobi; at least it is not convincing. Still less is it conceivable that their legends should suggest an acquaintance with the Jewish colonies in China, or even with the Nestorian tablet at Sin-gan-fu."

[12] The tradition of the Lost Book is not peculiar to the Karen, but seems to be found also among other tribes in and about Burma, *e. g.*, the Kawa, Wa, Palaungs, and the Hkamoks of Siam: letter of Mr. Taw Sein Ko to Thra Ba Te, dated 10th Oct., 1917.

[13] In a letter to the Baptist Missionary Society, dated Oct., 1853, Dr. Mason mentions hearing of the shipwreck on the Tenasserim River some decades before of a foreign merchant who told the Karen that other white men would come and teach them about God. He adds that he thought that the traditions came from Portuguese priests who had earlier come to the East. But in a later letter, dated Oct., 1854, Dr. Mason writes that he had come to believe that the traditions were indigenous with the Karen, whom he thought to be the lost Hebrew tribes. He wrote a communication to the Government to that effect from the "Headquarters of the Tenasserim," dated Dec. 6, 1853. (See *Missionary Magazine*, Bos., 1850, p. 449, and Oct. 1854, p. 382).

[14] See *Journal, American Folklore*, Vol. XXXI, No. CXX, pp. 269, ff. for his review of Sir J. G. Scott's Indo-Chinese Mythology, in *Mythology of All Races*, Vol. XI.

[1] [i.e. Bronze drums, see p. 9, cat. 116 -- Analyst.]

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Sin-gan-fu. The small number of Jewish immigrants into China, who were chiefly settled at K'ai-fong in Ho-nan, have never been able to exert the slightest influence on their surroundings, but, on the contrary, have been so completely sinsized that they are now almost extinct. Nestorianism left no trace on the thought of Chinese society. The inscription in question is written in such an exalted and highly literary style that it is quite unintelligible to the people and its technical terminology is a complete mystery to the present scholars of China. No popular influence can be attributed to such a monument." It appears that the number and antiquity of early Jewish immigrants into China have been much overestimated by many writers, so that, if present scholarship is correct, this source from which the Karen could have obtained their tradition has practically been eliminated.[15]

Though there seems to be little ground left for connecting the Karen story of the creation with either the Jewish or Nestorian colonies of China, there are one or two points that might be borne in mind in regard thereto. The story is universally known among the Karen tribes and most fully among the Red Karen, who have been least affected by outside influences in recent times. It contains no reference to the life or teachings of Christ or to any real Messianic hope, but suggests only *Old Testament material*, such as the creation, fall, flood, and tower of Babel, besides containing the Red Karen genealogy. Hence, it would seem that we can hardly attribute the story to the Portuguese missionaries, who were not in Burma until the sixteenth century or later. It would rather point to an earlier Jewish source, from which the story came back in the days when the tribes were less divided than they were later. For if Christian teachers had taught the Karen, would they not have made a deeper impression with their story of salvation than with the less significant one of creation?

Some writers have asserted that the original religion of China was a sort of monotheism, in which one god, the Emperor of Heaven, was somewhat akin to the Jehovah of the Hebrews, though not worshiped to the exclusion of all other deities. There

[15] See also *China and Religion* by E. G. Parker, who says (page 168) that there is no mention of any Western religion in China up to the end of the sixth century, A. D., when Christianity entered the country, except Buddhism which had come in centuries before. On page 165 he gives the date of the arrival of the Jewish colonies in China as 1163, A. D. The article on China in the latest edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* also bears out this testimony.

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000 is a bare possibility that the Karen tradition might have some relation to such an ancient belief.[16]

However, the story of the creation among these people has such a marked parallelism with the Hebrew story that, even though its origin has not been traced, we find it difficult to avoid the suspicion that it came from an Hebraic source, being carried by some wandering story-teller or unknown missionary only to become incorporated into the tribal belief of the Karen, along with their own primitive mythology.

The hilly province of Yunnan in southwestern China, with 174 its great mixture of races, answers the description of an ancient reservoir of fugitives and migrating groups from both India and China. In the marauding expeditions and massacres taking place among the contending elements in such a "melting pot," the oriental conquerors showed mercy only to the women among the foe and made wives of them. On the assumption or theory that the Karen spent a part of their migratory period in Yunnan, they may have preserved a greater degree of racial purity by their practice of strict endogamy and their custom of retreating to mountain fastnesses.[17]

From Yunnan the route that was probably followed by the Karen was by way of the Mekong or Salween into the upper part of what is now the Shan States. Thence they spread southward over what is now Karenni and then on to Lower Burma and Tenasserim.[18]

We are unable to determine when these migrations took place, or when the Karen entered Burma. If it could be shown that the ancestors of the Karen were among those from whom the drum tribute was exacted by the Chinese generals, we should know that they were dwellers in Yunnan at the beginning of the Christian era.

● 173 Dr. Mason notes a tradition that a Karen chief went to the site of Labeung, intending to bring his people to settle there, but that when he returned with his followers the Shan had already occupied the location. The founding of Labeung has been fixed at 574 A.D. This comes the nearest to being a definite landmark in the south-

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[16] John Ross, in *The Original Religion of China*, makes this the subject of an interesting volume. Also E. H. Parker, *China and Religion*, gives a few hints that may show that the earliest ancestors of the Chinese had one god in much greater esteem than the other beings in their mythology.

[17] Sir J. G. Scott, *Introduction to Indo-Chinese Mythology*, *Mythology of all Races*, p. 208.

[18] C. C. Lewis, *Ethnological Survey of India*, (1908) p. 18.

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ward migration of the Karen people. The vicinity of Laboung was probably the stopping-place on their long journey.[13]

Mr. J. O'Riley, one of the earliest English officers to travel in the Karenni, writes that he found traditions indicating that the

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country around Pagan was one of the early homes of the Karen and that they were driven southwest from there, while the Chinese who were with them were driven back to their own country, and the Kollahs (foreigners), northward. The Karen then appear to have gone to the Shan country, Hyoung Yuay, and thence to have been driven to the Myobyay province. Here, according to tradition, they were again attacked and, having in time greatly increased in numbers, they turned against the Shan, expelled them, and occupied the present Red Karen country.[20]

The fact that the Karen are found farther south than the Shan also argues that they migrated earlier and were perhaps pushed on by the latter, who in turn may have given way before a more powerful force at their heels. O'Riley learned of a tradition of the Red Karen which suggested that they had lived ten generations in their present home.[21] This would limit their sojourn here to a

[13] Lt. Col. A. R. Macmahon, *The Karens of the Golden Chersonese*, p. 114.

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Concerning their origin much that is legendary has been written. In the *Karen Thesaurus* we are told in substance that these drums ("klo oh tra oh") are very expensive and are owned in Lower Burma by a few very wealthy persons, who make offerings of food and liquor to them annually, fearing an early death if they fail to do this. The drums are said by some to have been brought from the "K'wa" country and by others from the "Swa" tribe.[2] Those who went to buy these objects paid according to the number of frogs on them, the price of one with two frogs being twenty rupees. The buyer put down the price and took away the drum, after which the owner came and got his money. If the buyer did not leave the money, he risked losing his way and being overtaken and eaten by the owner. The drums are used in making a noise like that of a gong.[3]

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Dr. Francis Mason, writing at Toungoo in 1868, speaks of these drums under the name of "kyee-zees," and is better informed than the writer in the *Thesaurus* in saying that they are obtained from the Shan. He also states that the Karen distinguish ten different kinds of drums according to sound and have a different name for each kind. Dr. Mason tells us that the best-sounding drums are worth a thousand rupees apiece, while the poorest bring only one hundred each. Dr. Mason continues: "The possession of Kyee-zees is what constitutes a rich Karen. No one is considered rich without one, whatever may be his other possessions. Everyone who has money endeavors to turn it into Kyee-zees, and a village that has many of them is the envy of the other villages and it is often the cause of wars to obtain possession of them."[4]

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Some of the Karens have told me that in the beginning these drums were obtained from the "Yu" people, who seem to have been the Jung or Yung who occupied Yunnan in ancient times.[5] Indeed, various indications point to the probability that the drums existed or were in use in Yunnan when the ancestors of the Karen passed through there from their home in western China into Burma,

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[2] The Swa are mentioned in some of the old Karen tales and appear to have been wild cannibals, of whom but little was known. Their location seems uncertain. Some of the tales place them beyond the great waters, while others suggest that they live to the north. Probably the references are to the Waer, who are one of the head-hunting tribes still living in the northern Shan States, on the Chinese frontier.

[3] *The Karen Thesaurus*, 1847, Vol. I, pp. 327, ff.

[4] *Journal, Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1868, Vol. XXXVII, Pt. II, pp. 128, ff.

[5] Mr. Taw Sein Ko, in *Annual Archaeological Report*, Burma, 1917, pp. 22, 23. Mr. Po Lin Te writes in the *Rangoon Gazette*, Sept. 27, 1919, that the Yu were the oldest of five families who emigrated from the Sandy River and were, therefore, entitled to use the drums.

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where they settled.* This is the view of the origin of the drums held by Heger and others. 534

Certain Karen traditions associate the drums with "Pū Maw Taw," one of the mythical characters of ancient times. This man was at work in his field and, seeing a flock of monkeys emerge from the forest, feigned death. Thereupon, the monkeys sent several of their number back to bring their drums for the proper performance of the funeral rites. Of the three brought, one was silver, one, gold, and the third, white in appearance. The last one fell into a pool of water and was lost. "Pū Maw Taw" suddenly interrupted the funeral ceremonies and the monkeys ran away, leaving the other two drums in the field. The old man took them home and they at once became the most sacred possession of the people, being consecrated every year with very great ceremony, until at last the Pwo Karen grew tired of making their annual journey for this purpose and carried them off. They were named "Gaw Kwa Htu" and "Gaw Kwa Se" † and are still believed to have been deposited in a cave near Donyan in Thaton district. Each drum had two sticks and a striker, all made of bronze. The smaller stick, which produced a rolling sound, was in the form of a centipede. The striker had a quilted surface, in appearance like the scales of a cobra. Unfortunately these drum implements had been left behind with the Sgaw, of Loo Thaw Ko village in the Papun district. Almost every year the Sgaw came down and demanded that the drums be given back to them, but without success. Gaw Le Bay and Gaw Ser Paw were the two Pwo Karens who committed the sacrilege of stealing away the drums, being punished for it with sore eyes, from which their descendants in Donyin suffer even unto this day. 534 773

All the elders believe that the bronze drums connect the Karen people with a remote past. But few of these objects that are still in existence can be traced back more than a century or two. Nevertheless, I have heard of some that are reputed to be much older, especially one in a Mopgha village, near Toungoo, which is said to date back "nearly a thousand years." This drum has a name, and innumerable offerings have been made to it year after year. 534 173

It was formerly thought that the Red Karen were the only tribe who possessed drums, but it now appears that these instruments were known among all the tribes. In many places, however, they are no longer used. It is in the remoter hill regions, where 534

* See Chapter I, pp. 9, 12.
† "Gaw" is the prefix used for drums, as "naw" is for guns.

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CHAPTER XXV

MOUNT "THAW THI." RELIGIOUS CULTS

THE SACRED MOUNT

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In Karen lore mention is often made of the sacred mountain, "Thaw Thi," which was early thought to be identical with the fabulous sacred mountain of the Buddhists, "Myenmo Taung." When, however, Dr. Mason went to Toungoo, he found that "Thaw Thi" was the dominating peak of the range of hills separating the valley of the Sittang from that of the Salween—a peak evidently held in reverence by the Burmese who call it "Nattaung," that is, the mountain of the "nats" or demons. Of this range "Thaw Thi" is the most impressive peak, although it is a thousand feet lower than Mount "Pghaw Ghaw" four miles to the north, which rises to a height of 8,607 feet above sea-level and from which a wonderful view may be had over the surrounding hills. Of these two peaks "Thaw Thi" is thought to be the wife and the more important. Its summit is a wide clear space which, the people believe, is swept clean every morning by the goddess "Ta La," who has her abode there.[1]

Several traditions concerning the mountain suggest that it may have been a place of veneration of the people in its neighborhood. One story connects Mount "Thaw Thi" with the flood that submerged the world, except the ridge along the top "as much as a comb." [2] When the flood receded, the peacock pheasant ("pgho ghaw") alighted on the summit now bearing its name. Another legend represents "Thaw Thi" as being considered the highest mountain in the world, whose sides abound with all kinds of game, these creatures being constrained to render homage to this kingly mountain. Hence, all the beasts and the birds of the air, including the tiger, bear, crocodile, wild dog, dragon, vulture, and adjutant, ascend in procession to do reverence.

[1] See p. 289.

[2] Dr. Mason, who is quoted in MacMahon's *The Karens of the Golden Chersonese*, 242, ff., is authority for this interpretation. A similar meaning was given me in Toungoo, but the spelling of the name of the bird and of the word meaning "as much as" differs a little from that commonly employed. These differences are probably due to local usage.

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Mount "Thaw Thi" also figures in some of the ancient folk-tales of the people. For example, one version of the story of the patriarch "Htaw Meh Pa" locates his home there. The den of the White Python is still pointed out on one side of the mount. It was to this den, according to the tale of "Ku Law Lay" and "Naw Mū E," that the fabulous serpent carried off the latter, whose husband dug holes there in trying to rescue her. These holes are also still shown.

When, in the middle of the nineteenth century, evangelists began to travel in the Toungoo district they discovered that the people living in the villages near Mount "Thaw Thi" indulged in various more or less elaborate rites on the peak. They had leaders or prophets in each village who interpreted the signs and set the time for the annual pilgrimage to the summit, where they sacrificed pigs and buffaloes, made offerings of wood and water, and built cairns of stones. A recent visitor to this spot reports that the cairns may still be seen, as also the broken pieces of the jars and bottles which once held the offerings; but that the paths are now overgrown, inasmuch as the former ceremonies have been long discontinued. Only a few old men recollect the pilgrimages to the summit made in their boyhood days. Some of these say that the people ascended the mountain to await there the appearance of the god, "Y'wa," in order that they might commune with him;[1] while others connect these rites with the Karen goddess, "Ta La," who they say dwelt there and must be propitiated at her own shrine. That "Y'wa" was venerated on the mountain is confirmed by the following poem, which Dr. Mason found in Tavoy, more than three hundred miles from "Thaw Thi" itself:

"'Y'wa' will come and bring the great 'Thaw Thi'.
We must worship, both great and small,
The great 'Thaw Thi', created by 'Y'wa'.
Let us ascend and worship.
There is a great mountain in the ford.
Can you ascend and worship 'Y'wa'?
There is a great mountain in the way.
Can you go up and commune with 'Y'wa'?
You call yourselves the sons of 'Y'wa'.
How often have you ascended to worship him?
You claim to be the children of 'Y'wa'.
How many times have you gone up to worship 'Y'wa'?"

That so conspicuous a peak as Mount "Thaw Thi" should have been regarded as the abiding-place of the great god, "Y'wa," and

[1] Rev. E. W. Blythe, of Toungoo, in *The Rangoon Diocesan Magazine*, (1917) Vol. XXI, No. 11, pp. 98, ff.